

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 550

HE 010 781

AUTHOR Jackson, Carla
TITLE Academic Advising and Student Attrition.
INSTITUTION Columbia State Coll., Columbia, Tenn. Office of Institutional Research.
PUB DATE 27 Oct 78
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented to the Southern Association for Institutional Research (Nashville, Tennessee, October 26-27, 1978) ; Tables 1 and 2 may be marginally legible

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attrition (Research Studies); College Faculty; *College Students; Dropout Prevention; Dropout Rate; *Dropout Research; *Educational Counseling; *Faculty Advisors; Higher Education; Longitudinal Studies; Private Colleges; *School Holding Power; Seniority; Teaching Experience

IDENTIFIERS *Student Attrition

ABSTRACT

The relationship between academic advising and student attrition was examined at a private liberal arts college. A cohort analysis of students entering the college between 1971 and 1975 indicated that faculty members in the first year of their contracts had relatively more of their new student advisees subsequently withdraw than did the same faculty members in later years of their contracts or did experienced faculty members in the same year. The results were considered by a college-wide retention study committee in efforts to reduce student attrition. (BD)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED165550

S A I R

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ACADEMIC ADVISING AND STUDENT ATTRITION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

"THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY."

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

*Southern assoc for
Instit Research*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND
USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Presented to the
Southern Association for Institutional Research
Nashville, Tennessee
October 26-27, 1978

Carla Jackson
Director of Institutional Research
Columbia State Community College
Columbia, Tennessee

HE010781



ACADEMIC ADVISING AND STUDENT ATTRITION

Carla Jackson

Not for quotation without permission

Abstract

The relationship between academic advising and student attrition is examined by describing the results of a research study conducted at a private liberal arts college and by suggesting the implications of this study for other colleges and universities concerned with improving student retention. A cohort analysis of students entering the college between 1971 and 1975 indicated that there was a wide distribution of withdrawn students according to initial faculty adviser and that individual faculty members could not be singled out as having been the first advisers of a disproportionate number of students. It was observed, however, that faculty members in the first year of their contracts had relatively more of their new student advisees subsequently withdraw than did the same faculty members in later years of their contracts or did experienced faculty members in the same year. The relationship between faculty experience and withdrawn advisees persisted even when controlling for the relatively larger number of new students assigned to new faculty advisers; these findings were statistically significant at the .01 level for most of the entering cohorts included in the study. These results from this study were considered by a college-wide retention committee in efforts to reduce student attrition and they suggest the possibility that other higher education institutions may find it useful to examine the relationship of academic advising to student withdrawals.

Report E78-01, prepared for the Annual Conference of the Southern Association for Institutional Research, October 26, 1978, Nashville, Tennessee.

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

COLUMBIA STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE • COLUMBIA, TENNESSEE 38401 • (615) 388-0120

Academic Advising and Student Attrition*

Carla Jackson

Although the relationship between academic advising and student attrition has been accorded relatively little attention in the literature on higher education (Pantages and Creedon, 1978), it seems possible that the quality of advising may contribute to student decisions to persist at or to withdraw from a college or university. The advising process at most higher education institutions assists the student in the selection of courses, the development of academic objectives, and the exploration of alternative choices, and it often provides the student a sense of involvement with and an understanding of the institution, contributing to individual satisfaction with a college experience. While poor advising probably will not in itself cause students to withdraw from an institution, it may exacerbate other dissatisfactions to the extent that a student may withdraw from college or transfer to another institution.

Academic advising has been considered particularly important at Hampshire College, a non-traditional baccalaureate-granting institution where students progress toward their degrees by the completion of self-designed divisional examinations. The development of a divisional examination requires not only the understanding of a particular mode of inquiry, but also a knowledge of how a learning contract is constructed and fulfilled. The advising process is an important element in assisting students in the progression toward graduation. Because of the importance of advising to the Hampshire system, it was determined to examine the relationship between academic advising and withdrawal decisions as part of a comprehensive analysis which sought to identify the causes of attrition at the college. Since the withdrawal rate from the college was approximately 40% at the time of this study, the identification of factors such as advising which might be related to attrition took on particular significance.

METHOD

Since an earlier cross-sectional analysis of withdrawals during a single semester had failed to reveal the existence of any significant relationship between advising and withdrawals (Kegan, 1977), a cohort analysis was undertaken which examined attrition from entering classes over time. An administrative computer system listing (SBJ803) was obtained including the names of all students who entered Hampshire College between Fall 1970 and Spring 1977, with status codes as of September 22, 1977. The students who were shown as withdrawn were then paired with their first adviser, based upon advising lists provided by the Dean's office. Because of the unavailability of matching data on first advisers, it was necessary to exclude from the analysis withdrawn students entering prior to Fall 1971. When it appeared

*Robert Birney provided many helpful comments in the preparation of this study. Adele Durham coded the data on first advisers of withdrawn students.

that there was a relationship between faculty experience at Hampshire and advisee withdrawals from the college, the number of withdrawn and non-withdrawn students from the entering cohorts of Fall 1973, 1974, and 1975 and Spring 1974, 1975, and 1976. Approximately six percent of the entering students from these classes were excluded from the analysis due to missing data for their first adviser.

FINDINGS

There was a wide distribution of withdrawn students according to their first faculty adviser, indicating that individual faculty members could not be singled out as having been responsible for a preponderance of withdrawn advisees. There were some initial differences among faculty members in the total numbers of withdrawn advisees, ranging from 0 to 21, but these differences appreciably diminished when a control was introduced for on-campus teaching FTE and length of service at the college. The total number of withdrawn first advisees adjusted for cumulative teaching FTE, which is the sum of the mean annual FTE's, ranged from 0.0 for several faculty members new in Fall 1976 to 14.0 for a part-time faculty member employed in 1972-73. However, a single trend seemed apparent from observing these data: with increasing length of service to the college, faculty members seemed to have fewer withdrawn advisees. Faculty members in their first year at the college had considerably more advisees withdraw than they did in subsequent years at the college, or did experienced faculty members in the same year.

Since it was difficult to determine whether this apparent trend represented an actual relationship between new faculty members and withdrawn advisees or merely reflected the disproportionate assignment of new students to new faculty advisers, some additional analyses were undertaken. Non-withdrawn students from the entering cohorts of Fall 1973, 1974, and 1975 were paired with their first faculty adviser to supplement information on the advisers of withdrawn students from these terms. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 2, indicating the existence of differential proportions of withdrawn advisees assigned to new and old faculty advisers. Among the students entering in Fall 1973, 43.5% of those initially assigned to a new faculty adviser withdrew from the College, in contrast to only 34.8% of those assigned to continuing faculty members. This finding was statistically significant at the .10 level. For the Fall 1974 cohort, 30.6% of the students assigned to new faculty members withdrew, while only 31.6% of those with returning faculty advisers did; for Fall 1975, the corresponding figures were 39.7% and 22.6%, indicating the persistence of the difference despite the relatively smaller number of students who have withdrawn due to the short period of time which has elapsed since their matriculation. The figures for Fall 1974 and 1975 were significant at the .01 level.

It is interesting to note that the percentage differences in withdrawn students assigned to new and returning faculty advisers is less in Fall 1973 than in either Fall 1974 or 1975. A considerable expansion in the size of both the student population and the faculty occurring in Fall 1973 meant that a large number of entering students were assigned to new faculty members for advising, and entering students with new advisers may have found their experience comparable to those of many other members of their entering classes. In subsequent

years, there have been fewer new faculty members and proportionately fewer students have been assigned to them for advising. New students assigned to new faculty advisers may have perceived that other students were obtaining more information from returning faculty members and this may have contributed to their overall level of satisfaction with the college and possibly to a withdrawal decision.

In an effort to determine whether the relationship between assignment to a new faculty adviser and subsequent withdrawal from the college persisted beyond the initial term of employment, the first advisers of non-withdrawn students from the Spring 1974, 1975, and 1976 cohorts were compared with those of withdrawn students from these entering classes. This information is also summarized in Table 2. The data from Spring 1974 indicate that there was a relatively larger proportion of withdrawn first advisees assigned to faculty with prior Hampshire experience than to faculty coming to the college the previous fall, but this phenomenon seems to be at least partially explained by the fact that relatively few entering students were assigned to new faculty members for the term. However, the fall term differentials in the withdrawal rates of students assigned to new and old faculty advisers persisted in the two other spring terms examined. In the Spring 1975 entering cohort, 39.4% of those assigned to new faculty members withdrew, in contrast to only 27.8% of those with experienced advisers; and for Spring 1976, the corresponding figures were 33.3% and 20.9%, indicating the existence of a differential despite the relatively short period of time which has occurred since these students initially entered the college. While it should be noted that there is a .30 probability that the figures for 1975 and 1976 are based on chance, they nevertheless suggest that it may require more than a single term on campus for new faculty to learn about the Hampshire College system and to develop the ability to communicate this knowledge to students.

DISCUSSION

These findings about the relationship between first adviser and withdrawn students were considered by a college-wide committee on retention in its efforts to reduce student attrition. The committee concluded that it was important to continue a previously-instituted new faculty orientation program, and further, it suggested that additional attention be accorded to the development of advising skills by new faculty members. It was also decided to implement a differential staffing pattern under which new faculty members would be released from advising responsibilities during their first term at the college and experienced faculty members and administrative staff would assume additional advising assignments. While this program is being initially implemented during the 1978-79 academic year and its effectiveness has therefore not as yet been evaluated, it is believed that it will provide new faculty members with additional time during which to learn about the college while providing students with informed advising.

While the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable to other institutions because of the uniqueness of the college, this analysis nevertheless has some potentially important implications for other college and universities concerned with student attrition. First, other institutions may find it productive to examine the relationship between academic advising and

student withdrawals. While students infrequently mention advising in either exit interviews or follow-up studies and advising is probably not in itself either a necessary or sufficient cause for withdrawal, it is possible that poor advising may increase dissatisfaction with an institution and may accordingly contribute to attrition. Second, colleges and universities may want to accord increased attention to the socialization of new faculty members into their roles as academic advisers. Advising skills are rarely developed in graduate school and must be acquired on the job; and also, advising is sometimes considered by faculty members to be an onerous and unimportant part of their work. An institution may accordingly want to undertake efforts to improve faculty advising skills and improve faculty attitudes toward advising as part of a retention program.

Third, this study suggests that it is important to predicate retention planning upon research findings, in identifying areas over which the institution can exert some control. For example, a number of student characteristics have been linked with college attrition, but it is unlikely that these characteristics have been linked with college attrition, but it is unlikely that these characteristics are subject to control by the institution. The institution, however, does have some control over programs and policies which research studies indicate may be related to attrition. As in this instance, the institution can undertake efforts to improve these programs.

Finally, this study suggests that cohort analysis is a useful methodological approach to the analysis of student attrition. An earlier cross-sectional study of withdrawals during one focal time period failed to reveal the existence of a relationship between first adviser and student withdrawals, which was indicated indicated by this study based upon a cohort analysis of withdrawn students.

References

Astin, Alexander W. Preventing Students from Dropping Out. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975.

Cope, Robert, and Hannah, William. Revolving College Doors: The Causes and Consequences of Dropping Out, Stopping Out, and Transferring. New York: Wiley, 1975.

Jackson, Carla. First Advisers of Withdrawn Students. Report #W84. Amherst, Massachusetts: Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation, Hampshire College, December 1977.

Kegan, Daniel. Withdrawals: First and Last Adviser and First House. Report #W74. Amherst, Massachusetts: Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation, Hampshire College, June 1977.

Pantages, Timothy J., and Creedon, Carol F. Studies of College Attrition: 1950 - 1975. Review of Educational Research, 48, (Winter 1978), pp. 49 - 101.

Terenzini, Patrick T. An Evaluation of Three Basic Designs for Studying Attrition. Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, May 1978.

Table 1
NUMBER OF WITHDRAWN STUDENTS
BY FIRST ADVISER AND ENTERING COHORT
1971-72 to 1976-77

Hire Date	71-72	72-73	73-74	74-75	75-76	76-77	Total	Cum. FTE	Adjusted no. of withdrawals	Faculty Name	Hire Date	71-72	72-73	73-74	74-75	75-76	76-77	Total	Cum. FTE	Adjusted no. of withdrawals
F70							0	2.31	0.		F71	5	3					8	1.00	8.00
69	5	8	4	2		1	20	6.00	3.30		F71	3	1	1	3			8	5.50	1.45
F70							4	3.00	1.33		F71	2	5		1			8	2.75	2.90
F70	3	4	2	1			10	6.00	1.67		F71	5		2	1		1	9	4.43	2.03
F70	4						4	1.50	2.67		F71		1					1	1.33	.75
F70	4	3	1	1			9	6.50	1.38		F71	5	1	4		1	3	14	5.50	2.50
F70	1		2	2	1		6	5.83	1.02		F71	4	7	3				14	3.00	4.67
F70	3			3	1		7	4.17	1.67		F71	2	4	1		3		10	5.00	2.00
F70	1						1	3.25	.31		F71	4	4	1				9	6.50	1.38
F70	2	2	1		1		6	3.25	1.84		F71	3	3	4				10	2.75	3.64
F70	5	4					9	3.00	3.00		F71	6	2		1		2	11	5.50	2.00
F70	1	5					5	3.49	1.43		F71	2	4		1	1	1	8	4.83	1.66
F70	3	1		1			5	1.67	2.99		F71	3	4	3				9	5.50	1.64
F70	4	3					7	6.00	1.17		F71	3						3	1.00	3.00
F70	2	1		4	1	3	11	5.50	2.00		F71	1	4	2		1		8	3.25	2.46
F70	3	3					6	2.51	2.39		F71	4				2	1	7	3.50	2.00
F70	1	6					6	2.42	2.48		F71	2	2	1	2		1	8	4.67	1.17
F70	1	1			1		3	5.67	.53		F71	5		1	1			7	3.00	2.33
F70	2	1	1	5	1		10	5.50	1.18		F71	7	3		1	2		13	5.33	2.43
F70	2	8	1	2			13	5.50	2.36		F71		6			1		7	3.00	2.33
F70	5		1	3			9	4.01	2.24		F72, F76						1	1	.84	1.19
F70	1	6					7	4.34	1.61		F72	7						7	.50	14.00
F70	8	2	1	4	4		19	6.00	3.17		F72	7			2	2		11	1.84	5.98
F70	6					1	7	5.17	1.35		F72	5		1	1		1	8	2.66	3.01
F70	2				2	1	5	6.50	.77		F72		3	1	1	4	2	10	3.17	3.13
F70			1	2			3	1.82	1.65		F72			3				4	1.00	4.00
F70	4		1		1		6	3.08	1.95		F72	4			2			3	3.01	1.00
F70	2	3		3	4		12	5.00	2.40		F72	1						7	3.83	2.34
F70	6	2	2		1		12	4.25	2.82		F72	7	1			1		7	4.00	1.75
F70		1	2				3	5.00	.67		F72	5				2		5		
F70	3						3	2.33	1.29		F72	2						2	.66	3.03
F70	5	7	5	1	2	1	21	6.50	3.20		F72	4				2		6	3.00	2.00
F70	3	2		1			6	2.33	2.58		F72, F75	3				4		7	2.00	3.50
F70		10					10	4.50	2.22		F72	6		1	2			9	2.33	3.86
F70	4	3	1				8	3.00	2.67		F72		3	2	2	1		6	3.42	1.75
F70	1	3	2		2		8	4.84	1.65		F72	9			3			12	4.13	2.90
F71	1						1	1.90	.53		F72	4		2				6	2.00	3.00
F71	9	2					11	3.50	3.14		F72	6			4			10	5.00	2.00
F71	4	7		1	1		13	6.00	2.16		F72	7				2		9	3.50	2.57
F71	3	2	1	1	1		8	4.67	1.71		F72	3						3	1.50	2.00

Table 1 (cont'd)

Data on first adviser were unavailable for the 1970-71 entering cohort. Faculty without advising responsibilities were excluded from the list of faculty members. Cumulative FTE is the sum of the mean annual FTE's.

TABLE 2
FIRST ADVISERS OF WITHDRAWN AND NON-WITHDRAWN STUDENTS

Entering Cohort: 1973 Fall

	Withdrawn	Not Withdrawn	
Assigned to new faculty adviser	123 (43.5%)	160 (56.5%)	283 (100.0%)
Assigned to experienced faculty adviser	57 (34.8%)	107 (65.2%)	164 (100.0%)
	180 (40.3%)	267 (59.7%)	447 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 3.27$

Entering Cohort: 1974 Spring

	Withdrawn	Not Withdrawn	
Assigned to new faculty adviser	0 (0.0%)	7 (100.0%)	7 (100.0%)
Assigned to experienced faculty adviser	20 (25.6%)	58 (74.4%)	78 (100.0%)
	20 (23.5%)	65 (76.5%)	85 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 2.35$

Entering Cohort: 1974 Fall

	Withdrawn	Not Withdrawn	
Assigned to new faculty adviser	44 (50.6%)	43 (50.4%)	87 (100.0%)
Assigned to experienced faculty adviser	77 (31.6%)	167 (68.4%)	244 (100.0%)
	121 (36.6%)	210 (63.4%)	331 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 10.00$

Entering Cohort: 1975 Spring

	Withdrawn	Not Withdrawn	
Assigned to new faculty adviser	13 (39.4%)	20 (60.6%)	33 (100.0%)
Assigned to experienced faculty adviser	27 (27.8%)	70 (72.2%)	97 (100.0%)
	40 (36.9%)	90 (69.2%)	130 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 1.54$

Entering Cohort: 1975 Fall

	Withdrawn	Not Withdrawn	
Assigned to new faculty adviser	31 (39.7%)	47 (60.3%)	78 (100.0%)
Assigned to experienced faculty adviser	60 (22.6%)	206 (77.4%)	266 (100.0%)
	91 (26.5%)	253 (73.5%)	344 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 9.16$

Entering Cohort: 1976 Spring

	Withdrawn	Not Withdrawn	
Assigned to new faculty adviser	8 (13.3%)	16 (66.7%)	24 (100.0%)
Assigned to experienced faculty adviser	14 (20.9%)	53 (79.1%)	67 (100.0%)
	22 (24.2%)	69 (75.8%)	91 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 1.49$